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ART NEEDLEWORK

ON COLOR IN ART NEEDLEWORK.



AFTER good design, good coloring becomes next in importance, and is so essential to a piece of embroidery that, while harmonious coloring may atone even for faulty design, a good design will certainly be spoiled by vulgar coloring. As the coloring of our work is a matter of so much

consequence, we cannot be too particular in considering it well beforehand, that all may be in harmony and in keeping, not only with itself, but with the purpose and position for which it is intended.

We have already seen that our work is not to be a mere copy of nature, but rather a skilful adaptation of her forms to decorative purposes. And as conventionalism in form is imposed upon us as a necessity, it also follows that the same necessity has to be observed in our imitation of nature with regard to color. This becomes apparent from the very outset. In many cases it is utterly impossible to give the natural coloring of a particular flower; we may perhaps be able to get its general tone, but the subtle gradations which are with difficulty reproduced in painting are quite out of reach in embroidery. As a simple instance, take a blue pansy: the first difficulty will be to get silk or wool dyed the proper shades; but supposing that overcome, a greater one will arise—that of mingling the tints, with all the delicacies of tone and intermixture of shade that are found in the flower, without producing a confused and unsatisfactory effect; and after our utmost efforts to represent a pansy as it appears in nature, the result is sure to be a failure. And if this be the case with a flower so simply colored as the pansy, how much greater the difficulty will be with flowers of more complex hues!

But there is another consideration. It must be remembered how different are the surroundings of flowers, as used for decorative effect either in painting or embroidery, from their surroundings in the open air. Therefore, in adapting their color to their place in indoor decoration, their more subdued tints and less brilliant aspect should be chosen; for their brighter colors have the clear air, the sunlight, their natural texture, and, above all, their evanescence, to render them delightful. The pure color alone, without these aids, transferred to needlework, would be glaring and gaudy. Moreover, as there is no raw color in nature, but an admixture of yellow in most of her hues, it is a great mistake to render her brilliancy, which is chiefly owing to subtle qualities of texture, by raw and gaudy silks and wools, which smite the eye without pleasing the sense. Thus, as it is impossible to reproduce the fluctuating iridescence of the natural flower, it is better to take nature as a suggestive guide rather than as a pattern for servile copying, and to choose colors with regard to their general harmony rather than their separate exact truth to nature.

Embroidery is a decorative work, and therefore must be regulated by the rules of decorative treatment; and as harmony is one of the first considerations, the attempt to combine a close imitation of nature in *color* with conventionalism in *form* would be a fatal error. Consistency of treatment must be aimed at, and having simplified the forms of nature, we must, for corresponding reasons, simplify the colors also.

The color of the ground of a piece of work must regulate its general tone. Some *one* prevailing color should be adopted, and the rest chosen with reference to it. In many instances this color has to be decided by the ultimate destination of the work, as in the case of "portières," or window curtains, which must be in keeping with the rest of the furniture of the room. But supposing the piece of work to be complete in itself, the color of the ground is first chosen, and then taken as a guide to the colors of the flowers to be embroidered upon it.

The colors chosen must not be in contrast, but in harmony. Thus if the ground be green, pure yellows

and pure blues will harmonize, while red will produce a violent contrast; green being composed of blue and yellow, either of its component parts will agree with it. Some of the most beautifully colored work is that done in one key of color—that is, one color is taken as the key-note, and those shades only are used that form its component parts, or that have the original color in their composition.

For instance, in embroidery on gold-colored satin, nothing will look so well as a design colored in shades of russet and golden browns, every now and then striking, as it were, the higher or lower octave of the key-note by the introduction of a lighter or darker shade of the pure ground color. Again, taking green for the ground, and treating it in the same way, it has first to be considered whether it is a yellow or blue green. If a yellow green, the highest note should then be yellow. The same harmony should be carried through the brown, warm, and russet greens, up to the primary color, yellow, to which all these tints owe their warmth, and which is the chief constituent of the ground. But if the ground be a blue green, colder greens must be used, of a sage rather than russet tint, while the key-note is struck with a pure blue, that being the chief constituent part of the ground color, and also the cool element in the other colors used. Worked under this careful restraint, the resulting effect, subdued though it be, is abundantly gratifying.

The combination of a greater variety of colors is not so easy. Contrasting colors require great care and judgment in their arrangement, and should be made by their rarity to add brilliancy to the surrounding harmony. If contrasting colors are placed side by side, the brilliancy of each is certainly enhanced, yet the result is not harmonious, but harsh and disturbing. Contrasting colors, however, are capable of producing good effects, but in managing them so much judgment and discretion is necessary that it is best to be on the safe side and avoid them, until we have attained such a degree of experience as may warrant a flight into these more difficult regions. Place a pure blue near a pure yellow, and the effect is crude and bad; but slightly tone the blue with yellow, and the yellow with blue, and instantly the effect becomes pleasing. In the same manner a strong blue and a bright red with a dash of yellow in it are harsh; but introduce in their neighborhood a subdued russet-green—the tertiary tint, a combination of the three—and a softer, more pleasing effect is imparted.

Pale soft tints are more easily combined than strong deep colors. If we would avoid vulgar coloring, we shall do well not to introduce more than two of the primary colors, in their purity, into one piece of work; the subordinate parts, as leaves and stalks or scroll work, must be more or less of neutral tints—olive, russet, and soft brown shades. Purples and tints inclining to blue are difficult to manage. Of the three primary colors, blue—the cold one in nature—pleases us, not by its coldness, but by its purity. The secondary tints, green and purple, lose tone in proportion to the amount of blue they contain, a preponderance of which adds to their coldness and hardness. In the tertiary tints, those that have the smallest proportion of blue in them, are to be preferred; as russet, which is one part blue, one part yellow, and two parts red; and olive, which is one part blue, two parts yellow, and one part red: these are both more pleasing than slate, which is two parts blue, one part yellow, and one part red.

It is not a bad rule to make the color that forms the larger constituent part of the ground the chief pure color used in the design, even when one key of color is not otherwise strictly carried out as explained above. Thus, where the ground is a *red* plum or maroon, pure red pinks—that is, pinks without any shade of blue in them—will harmonize satisfactorily and be much more pleasing than if blue—the lesser element of the ground color—be used; but if the ground be of a *blue* plum color, pale blue would be more pleasing than pink, blue being the leading color in the ground.

We will describe a piece of silk embroidery in which this plan of color was most charmingly carried out. The ground was bronze-green satin; upon it were worked sprays of convolvulus springing from a vase of gray satin; the convolvulus flowers were white, edged with a pure blue—not the purplish blue of the natural flower, for that would not have harmonized so well—and yet there was nothing unnatural in the effect of the color. The leaves were of yellow and gray greens, and the stalks a brownish green. Then, to give warmth and life, some sulphur butterflies hovered over the garlands. Thus, though in the coloring of the design the component parts only of the bronze green ground were used, the effect was perfect. This piece of work was for the front of an upright piano, and its quiet cheerfulness replaced with admirable effect the usual unmeaning fretwork lined with silk of some raw color. Color is so much a matter of feeling, and of so subtle a nature, that only the most general rules can be safely given, and even these more as guides than as laws to be implicitly obeyed. Shades and tones are so varied and uncertain that it is impossible to describe them in words; the eye must be educated to appreciate them, and to learn their combinations and effects, which in the description may be so easily misapprehended.

HAVANESE EMBROIDERY.

A NEW kind of embroidery has been introduced in England, which recommends itself not only by its brilliant effect, but also by the absence of all technical difficulties in the working. Havanese embroidery, as it is called, is composed entirely of buttonhole stitches, a stitch with which every lady is familiar. The single leaves and stalks are worked with one row, commencing at the point, and gradually adapting the length of the stitches to the pattern. The point of the leaf ought to be executed with special care, and the following stitches placed together, to form even outlines at the borders, the buttonhole cord appearing as a rule on the convex curve of the leaf. Veined leaves are buttonholed in two rows, the two cord lines meeting along the centre, which gives to the leaf a raised appearance. In star-shaped flowers and similar devices the buttonhole stitches radiate from the circumference to the centre. Outline leaves and flowers can be filled with crossed bars of gold thread or filoselle cord, which are to be fastened down at each crossing with fine silk of corresponding or contrasting color.

THE SUPPLEMENT.

THE large design for crewel work given in the supplement (No. I.) will be found a suitable companion to the cat-tail pattern published in our June number.

The roses are shaded from white, through salmon pink to red, five shades; centres yellow, two shades. A border can be added, if it is desirable to widen the pattern. The top of the roses is only copied once; after the first time you repeat from the third rose. The flowers can also be done in yellow, or treated as brier roses, white tipped with pink. This pattern would be very handsome worked on white satin as a "plastron" for evening dress, with yellow roses.

The plate decoration is from a daintily colored design composed and forwarded to us by Minnie Woodward, of San Francisco. She writes: "The coloring of the flowers (*Nemophila insignis*, or Baby-eyes), the maidenhair fern, and the butterfly (*American Soldier*), is strictly true to nature; although the size of the butterfly is a trifle enlarged." The latter has brown body, with top of the head red; light yellow wings, with the upper portion orange, and the inside of the upper portion vermillion. The Baby-eyes are light blue. The band across the plate is very light brown. The rim of the plate is gilded, as is also the margin of the band.

The design for the decoration of a Japanese fan or screen, arranged with great skill by Professor Camille Piton, may also be used as a pattern for needlework etching.

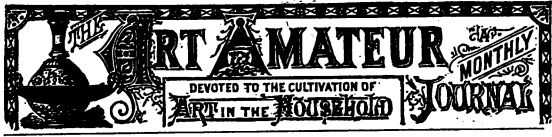


PLATE I.

[For description, see page 101.]





DESIGN FOR A STRIP FOR PORTIERE, CURTAIN, OR EASY CHAIR, IN CREWEL WORK.

PLATE II.

[For description, see page 101.]

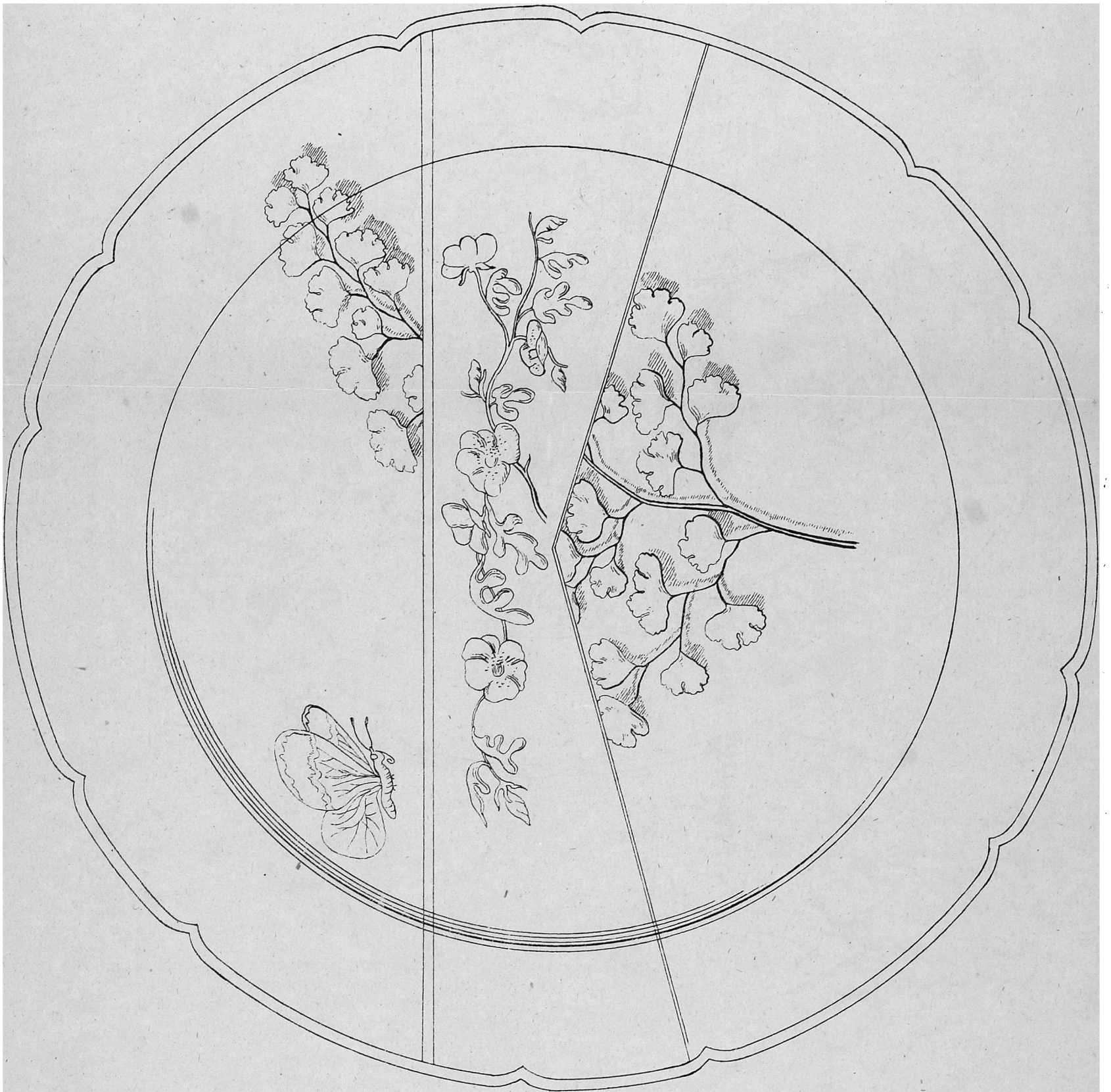
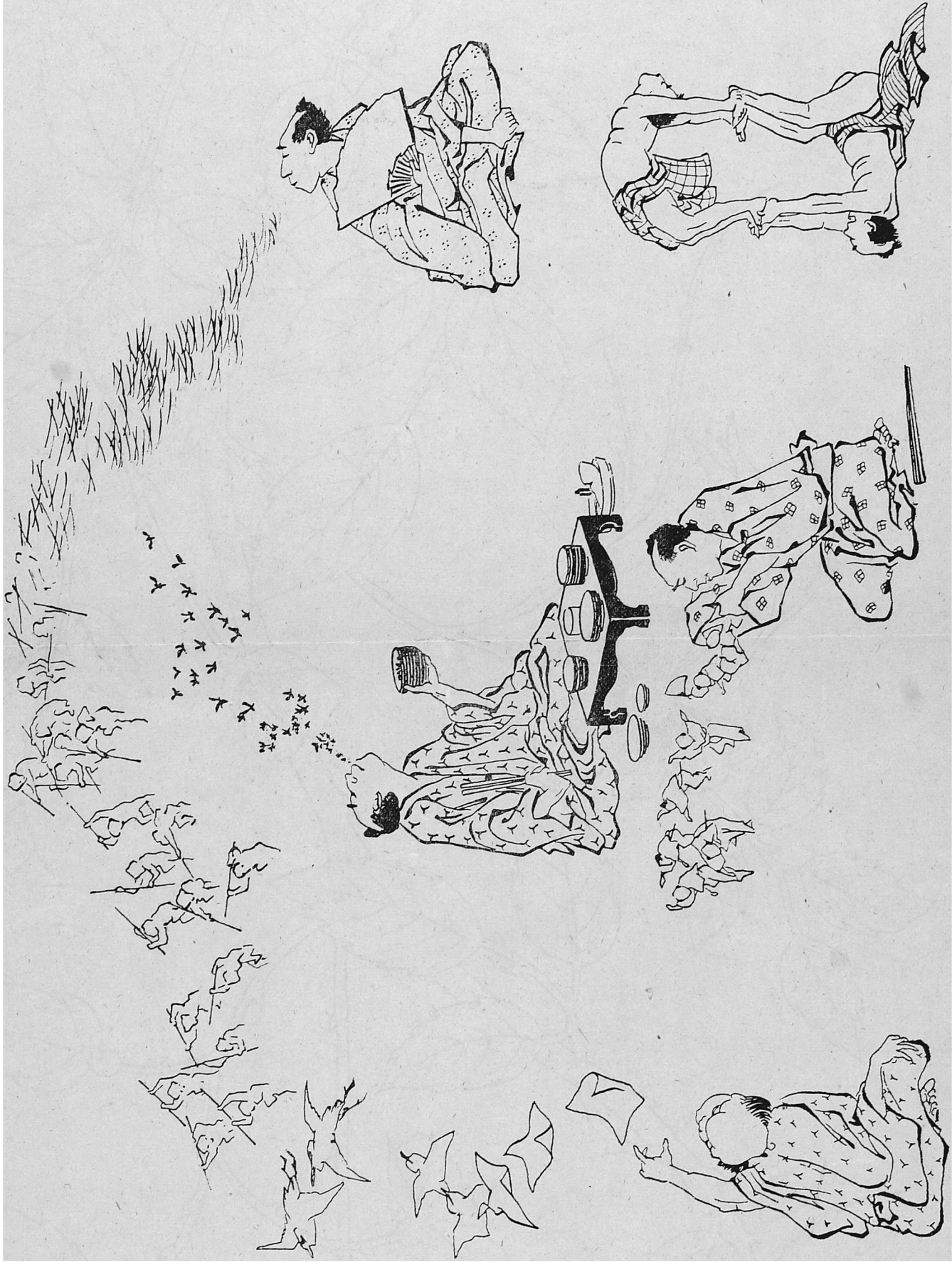


PLATE DESIGN FOR PAINTING ON CHINA.

By MINNIE WOODWARD, San Francisco.

PLATE III.

[For description, see page 101.]



DESIGN FOR DECORATION OF A JAPANESE FAN OR SCREEN.

Arranged by CAMILLE PRON, of Philadelphia.